

Chapter Six

A Prison of Ice

The day of the abortion was a warm gray day, with a very fine mist falling from the sky. We drove silently to the abortion center, and parked in the lot. “Do you want me to come in with you?” I asked. She told me to wait in the car, and to be truthful I was relieved not to go into that place.

As I was sitting there alone in my car it began to hit me what was about to happen. How can I sit here and let this happen to my baby—that’s my son or daughter they are going to kill! I jumped out of the car and ran into the building. The receptionist told me that Janet was in the procedure room and that I could take a seat and wait. I blew past her and after bursting through a few doors came upon a scene that burned into my mind and haunted me for months after.

As I entered that room, Janet screamed out “John, what are you doing?”

The doctor looked at me and smiled, “John we are just finishing up, everything went fine.” I looked at Janet; she was white as a ghost and crying. Our baby had just been killed! I was unable to stop it. I even paid for it to happen! It was a living nightmare. I stormed out of the building knocking over some chairs and a trashcan in my rage. We drove home in silence, both in shock.

I first met Janet in a softball league. She was actually a pretty good player and a great pitcher. We hit it off right away. We were very attracted to one another and after a lot of mutual flirting I finally got the nerve to ask her out. I knew she already had a child from a previous relationship, but I was so taken by her that didn’t bother me a bit. Janet just started a new job as a Para-legal secretary. She really wanted to get her life together so she could be a role model for her daughter who was four years old at the time. We progressed to regular dating and eventually we began to have sex. I was falling deeper in love with her and grew attached to her daughter as well.

When we had sex we would always use birth control. There was one night we went out together, we had a great time. We went to hear a local band, went dancing and partied it up. When we go back to her apartment we just threw caution to the wind, and had unprotected sex. I am not sure why we did that, I think we were just caught up in the joy of being together, of the love and passion we shared.

A few weeks later she told me she missed her period. My first reaction was fear, but I also felt excited about being a dad. I was in love with Janet, and hoped we could work it out. Unfortunately Janet had a much different reaction.

Janet was already a single parent. She just started a new job she loved. She was embarrassed to be in this situation again, and felt that she couldn’t face family and friends again with another unplanned pregnancy. Janet felt stupid, foolish and angry. I told her that I would help her, and

that we could get married. She didn't want to marry because of the pregnancy, and I don't think she trusted that I would be there for her down the line (she had been down that road before).

That's when Janet first said it; "I want to get an abortion." I felt sick in my stomach. I felt like this is my kid too, and I wanted to have this baby. But I was also scared of losing Janet. Maybe Janet sensed my fear, or maybe I wasn't strong enough in opposition—maybe it wouldn't have mattered, I don't know. I knew that she was set on getting that abortion.

I decided to support Janet in her decision, pay for the abortion and drive her to the abortion center.

In the days ahead after that nightmare in the abortion center, I was filled with rage at the abortion doctor and Janet. How could they do this to my child! Was this the only way? Why couldn't we work this out and save our baby! Why was this child sacrificed because of our stupidity! I stopped seeing Janet. I was too filled with rage, anger and grief to even look at her.

For the next four months after the abortion I slept very little. I would lie awake at night and stare at the ceiling reliving that day. When I slept I would dream of that same horrible scene where I would break into the abortion procedure room, but in these nightmares I would find my dead baby, in pieces. I would awaken from this terror filled with rage and grief—how could I let this happen, how could I have been so weak, so evil. But my grief quickly transformed into a seething rage at Janet, the abortionist, and the abortion business that took the life of my child. I was sure that I would never escape this nightmare—it was God's punishment for my sins.

I returned to work, and looking back now, the routine of work during those months saved my life. At least during the day I could stay focused on work and escape my private hell—but at night, the demons returned to torture me till dawn. I would get a few hours sleep if I was lucky, and just try to get through each day.

After four months of this hell a ray of light shown into my darkness. I continued to go to Church off and on after the abortion. I would sit in the back like a zombie, waiting for the Lord to strike me with lightning—I was actually praying that he would take my life. I also prayed for the strength not to take my own life, or worse do something stupid to the clinic or doctor and get arrested. But God gave me a road to travel that would save my life and much more.

This particular Sunday, near the close of the service, a speaker got up and talked to us about a healing weekend for people involved in abortion called Rachel's Vineyard Retreats. There were pamphlets in the back of the Church and I took one. I read it and picked up the phone for days to make that call but couldn't bring myself to finish dialing that last number! Finally I made the call and found that men were welcome, and registered for their next weekend retreat.

I can't say I was especially confident that this would help me. It was more like "If this doesn't help me, I don't really want to go on living. This is my last hope, the last stop." I arrived at the retreat house Friday evening after work. Like my father, I'm a man of few words and I am shy when I first meet people. I was in so much pain, so filled with anger at Janet, the doctor, myself

that I felt like I was trapped inside an invisible layer of ice that I couldn't get out of, and I wouldn't let anyone enter into.

The retreat began and I very slowly started to thaw. On Saturday morning of the retreat we broke into groups to share the story of our abortion. There were a number of women in my group. Hearing their stories of what they went through emotionally in making the decision, and how they suffered after their abortion, began to lessen my rage at Janet. There were scripture mediations used throughout the retreat based on stories from the New Testament that we personally enter into the story.

One of them focuses on the story of the blind beggar who Jesus asks, "what do you want me to do for you." Wasn't it clear that the guy was blind and wanted to see Jesus! But I learned that Jesus required our "yes." He required our participation in his saving action. These exercises and meditations were powerful, and even as scared and doubting as I was, I was meeting Jesus in those exercises, and asking him quietly to heal me. I hardly spoke, but I participated in all the activities, and each one planted seeds of grace. My heart was beginning to open up just a crack, but that tiny crack was all that God needed.

By early Saturday afternoon, we began to think about our children, not as dismembered nightmare babies, but as real children, with a face, name and a unique personality. We lit candles, naming the child and placing the candles in a bowl of water symbolizing the Well of Jacob and new life in Christ. For the first time instead of emptiness and rage I felt grief, and the tears slowly began to flow.

I had the sense that the aborted baby was a girl, and I named her Elizabeth. The next exercise which takes place early Saturday evening is an especially beautiful mediation where you are walking out of a dark forest and into a beautiful meadow where children are playing with Jesus. Before this retreat I would have had trouble believing such a thing, but during this mediation I had a very real encounter with a little girl playing in that meadow. As she approached me I knew in my heart that this was my Elizabeth. In the meditation she seemed to be around 3 or 4 years old, but in another way her face was timeless and ageless, like an angel. She looked intently in my eyes, and I could feel that she was communicating something to me, not with words, but in my heart.

I could feel my heart open up with love for her during the course of the evening as I prayed and wrote a letter to her to be read at the memorial service the next day. I came to better understand what she spoke to my heart during that meditation:

"I still need you to be my Daddy. But as long as your heart is imprisoned by hatred and revenge, there is no way for me to enter your heart, so you can embrace me as your daughter. We cannot love each other the way I want to be loved. I still want you to be my father and to claim me as your own, and love me as your child."

From the innocent heart of a child, denied life by my weakness, came the truth of my healing. If I remained consumed with hatred and thoughts of revenge, I would stay locked in that prison of

pain and possibly hurt someone or more likely myself. No one could get close to me and I wouldn't let any one in. Now my wall of rage and hatred were being dismantled, and my heart was softening and the tears could flow. I could face the searing pain that lie beneath my rage, the deep grief at participating in the death of my little girl, and how much I missed her. But I was also filled with great consolation, because I knew that she was alive in the Lord, that we could have a spiritual relationship, and that we would be re untied in some way in eternity, God willing. This was such a healing realization for me! This was such a gift, a gift that without exaggeration saved my life!

Since that retreat I participated in a men's bible study at my church. I have come to realize that my anger at Janet was really not fair. God has given men a great responsibility, and we need to protect and provide for the women and children the Lord entrusts to us. That protection begins by offering them the commitment and stability of marriage before entering into a sexual relationship. I put her in that crisis by having sex with her without offering her the security of a commitment. She was vulnerable as a single mom, wanting the love and companionship of a man, but also in the position that another baby out of wedlock led her to see abortion as the only solution. Yes, it's true that Janet has her own responsibility in all this and I pray for the healing of her post abortion grief. But having sex outside of God's plan, put Janet and eventually the child we conceived at risk.

I wrote a letter to Janet and apologized for my role in the abortion. I shared with her about my retreat, and gave her resources for healing. I continue to learn more about my Christian faith and God's will for my life.

I have days where I miss my daughter, but I live with the hope that when my life is ended I will once again see the precious face of that little girl I met on that special Saturday evening of my Rachel's Vineyard Retreat, when she reached out to this wounded sinner and called me, "Daddy."